

REVIEWS

## Carl F. Petry: *The Mamluk Sultanate: A History*

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The field of Mamluk studies, the common name for the scholarship dedicated to understanding various aspects of the history of the Mamluk sultanate (648/1250–922/1517), has witnessed remarkable developments over the last few decades. There is now a community of enthusiastic “Mamlukists” who convene regularly in specialized colloquia and publish a substantial number of captivating and diverse studies in dedicated venues that appear in English, German, Arabic, Turkish, French, Hebrew, Japanese, and Italian, and reflect advances that span every discipline of history. Such developments are possible owing to the cultural legacy of the Mamluk period, which left us a treasure trove of historical sources (both literary and material) to examine as a result of prolific cultural production that was often driven by the charitable endowments of Mamluk military and civilian elites.

Despite this legacy, Mamluk studies has had no grand narrative or overview, no *History of the Mamluk Sultanate*. For far too long Mamlukists have lacked a source akin to Jonathan Riley-Smith’s concise and still influential one-volume survey, *The Crusades: A History* (1987). Finally this bewildering gap in historiography has been filled with the long-awaited publication of Carl F. Petry’s *The Mamluk Sultanate: A History*. An authority on the social and cultural history of the Burji/Circassian period, author of the influential *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (1981) and other vital works, and editor of the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Egypt* (1998), Petry is the ideal scholar to accomplish this much-needed contribution.

Petry highlights the absence of such a work hitherto. The astonishing transformation of the Mamluk institution of military slavery into an autonomous state ruled from Cairo was an exceptional occurrence in world history and it was odd that it had not previously yielded a book on the Mamluk sultanate “beyond a summation of its political trajectory” (p. 3), he notes.

He perceptively highlights the relevance of this sultanate that “presided over the central Islamic lands during their transition from the medieval to early modern periods” and, in addition, notes how its ongoing study by a generation of international scholars is “reshaping the field of Islamic History overall” (p. 203). Using a wealth of captivating detail, Petry brings to life this unique experience of a powerful empire ruled by military-slaves, while scrutinizing the politics, processes, and characters behind its rise and highlighting its durability for over two and a half centuries. To complete his survey, Petry successfully integrates into his study recent developments not just in historiography but in “the disciplines of anthropology archaeology, art and architecture, gender and

literary studies, education and pedagogy, politics, political economy, and religious studies” (p. 3).

Following a Khaldunian introduction, chapter 1 conveys an eloquent, concise synopsis of the major milestones of Mamluk history. Chapter 2 studies the sense of Mamluk identity, their military training system, and provides rich information on barracks culture and Mamluk organization, ranks and titles. It explains the perceived volatile, violent and conspiratorial nature of the regime and, furthermore, problematizes the use of the term slavery to describe the status of Mamluks. This chapter over-amplifies the role of the Ilkhanid threat in defining the Mamluk ethos. Chapter 3 is a lucid assessment of the sultanate’s global role within an interconnected Mediterranean, Red Sea and Indian Ocean. However, the impactful Mamluk–Golden Horde interactions are missing. Chapter 4 focuses on the Mamluk administration, the educational and judicial systems, and the learned groups that operated them. It reflects the complexities of the sultanate’s bureaucracy and its processes of selecting, deposing, and blaming appointees. Chapter 5 examines the sultanate’s political economy, agriculture, administration, taxation, and the *rawks* (cadastres), and traces their Ayyubid roots. It highlights the impact of al-Nasir Muhammad’s dynasticism on Mamluk administration, the Mamluk role in global commerce, and the pressing need for alternative streams of revenue. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the cultural legacy of Mamluk patronage. It covers various aspects of literary and dramatic production, the proliferation of new genres and styles, and the widening of readership audiences. Moreover, chapter 6 includes an exquisite survey of Mamluk historiography that makes it an indispensable supplement to Donald D. Little’s *Historiography of the Mamluk and Ayyubid Epochs* (1998). Chapter 7 covers a collection of different themes including rural life, gendered history and the relations between men and women, the status of religious minorities, and Sufism. The reader may initially consider this a random assortment of themes, but it quickly develops into an enjoyable chapter that does a great job in bringing forward the latest developments in Mamluk studies. The final section, “Reflections”, ends the book on another Khaldunian note and raises relevant points on slavery and authoritarianism.

A pedantic shortlist of minor complaints can be assembled. Some of the book’s descriptors of the Mamluks – such as “ruling oligarchy” – belong to far-from-settled debates in the field. In some chapters, the majority of the citations are to *EI2* and dated secondary works, which might discourage scholars who seek in this book an indispensable reference to the Mamluk period. Also, the development of Sufism under the Mamluk sultanate warranted a deeper examination, especially Sufi involvement in ideological rifts and the Sufis’ role in the sultanate’s political life. Most importantly, although not completely missing from the book, Mamluk urbanism and architecture merited more attention. Like other eastern Mediterranean cities, Cairo, the sultanate’s main seat, is moulded by the endowments, urban policies, and the personal, social, political and religious plans of the Mamluks. Lastly, the author’s affinity with the Burji-Circassian period is discernible: in chapter 1 for instance, only 18 of 47 pages are dedicated to the Bahri period. This is comprehensible given Petry’s unrivalled erudition on the later Mamluk period, but it also meant that sections of the book felt like a continuation of Robert Irwin’s *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (1986).

*The Mamluk Sultanate: A History* is a well-conceived, thoughtfully structured, accessible and lucid survey of this important period in Islamic history. Most chapters can be assigned as readings in advanced or basic overview modules on medieval Islamic history. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 especially contain state-of-the-art surveys of the latest developments in the field thus marking Petry’s book as the essential starting point for any future research on Mamluk history over the next decade or two. In addition to the informed general readership, this book is highly recommended for every Mamlukist and scholar of

Islamic history, historians of the Mediterranean, and for medievalists and early-modernists interested in the global political and economic connections of their periods. In short, Carl F. Petry's contribution is the authoritative, concise, lucid, one-volume survey of the Mamluk period that every Mamlukist has been eagerly awaiting.

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## **Gül Şen: Making Sense of History. Narrativity and Literariness in the Ottoman Chronicle of Na'imā**

**(The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage: Politics, Society and Economy, 74.) xiv, 387 pp. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. ISBN 978 90 04 51041 8.**

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At almost 3,000 pages, the chronicle of the middle-ranking bureaucrat Mustafa Na'imā that is the subject of Gül Şen's monograph is a behemoth of Ottoman literature and one of the most prominent examples of the official historiography of the empire. Written in the years after 1700, and covering the period 1574–1660, *Ravzat ül-Ḥüseyn fi ḥulāṣat-i aḥbār ül-ḥāfiqayn* (*The Garden of Ḥüseyn: the Summary of Tidings from the East and the West*), usually known today as *Tārīḥ-i Na'imā*, or the *Chronicle of Na'imā*, at last receives the forensic examination it demands. In an admonition to modern readers, Şen writes that the *Chronicle* would have been read at the time as “a literary text with aesthetic merits beyond its character as a compilation of historical facts”. In exposing Na'imā's work to the tools and insights of literary criticism and cultural studies, she invites us into the intellectual world of his contemporaries.

Na'imā's *Chronicle* is complex in construction, and the autograph undiscovered. The many manuscript copies extant in whole or in part indicate that the work was popular. It was among the seventeen books printed between 1729 and 1742 by the Ottoman-language printing press set up by İbrahim Müteferrika, and is recorded in both manuscript and printed form in the estates of the educated deceased of the time. It is still a staple of Turkish high school and university history curricula.

Şen's account of Na'imā's life and career expands on the information provided half a century ago by Lewis V. Thomas in his *A Study of Naima* (New York, 1972). She maps his appointments around the empire, showing the years spent in each post, from his birth in Aleppo, to office in Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakir, Bursa, Chania, Edirne, Gallipoli, and Patras, where he died. Among Na'imā's most significant patrons were the grand vezirs Köprülü 'Amcazāde Ḥüseyn Pasha, and Nevşehirli Dāmād İbrāhīm Pasha. 'Amcazāde Ḥüseyn appointed him to be the first holder of the new office of court chronicler, and to complete the now lost work left unfinished at his death by another teller of the empire's history, Şāriḥ ül-Menārzāde Aḥmed Efendi.

Na'imā draws upon the works of earlier historians as the foundation of his own: Şen dissects his *Chronicle* and ascribes to him only those passages where his authorship can